

“Making the Connection”
Connecting Civic & Character Education to Civic Engagement
November 13, 2012
Remarks of Carolyn B. McHugh,
Presiding Judge, Utah Court of Appeals

It is my pleasure to speak with you this evening.

First, on behalf of the members of Utah’s Commission on Character and Civic Education, let me express our sincere gratitude for your attendance at this seminar.

The Utah Legislature formed the Commission to encourage and to assist educators with the incorporation of lessons on character and civics into the existing curriculum. Your presence today advances this partnership and its goal that Utah students graduate with the skills necessary to preserve the principles that make this country great.

To do so effectively, our youth must understand how our constitution is designed and why, appreciate and embrace opportunities to participate meaningfully and respectfully in the democratic process, and exhibit the altruism and integrity necessary to act for the common good. This is an enormous, but ultimately essential, task that was assigned to us by the founding fathers.

The remarkable individuals who created our government and enshrined its principles in our constitution recognized the importance of civic education. John Jay considered “knowledge to be the soul of a republic.” See Grant Tilus, *Educational Quotes from Our Founding Fathers*, RASMUSSEN COLLEGE (July 2, 2012),

<http://www.rasmussen.edu/student-life/blogs/main/Educational-Quotes-from-Our-Founding-Fathers/>

And Thomas Jefferson advised:

I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society, but the people themselves: and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their [control] with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is, not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education. [T]his is the true corrective of abuses of constitutional power.

Letter from Thomas Jefferson, third U.S. President, to William C. Jarvis, U.S. Diplomat (Sept. 28, 1820), available at <http://www.monticello.org/site/jefferson/quotations-education>

Despite this clear guidance from the founders of this country, the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) 2010 Civics Report Card is disturbing. Only 27% of tested fourth graders; 22% of tested eighth graders; and 24% of tested twelfth graders showed proficiency in civics. See National Center for Education Statistics, *The Nation’s Report Card: Civics 2010*, NAEP (May 2011), <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pubs/main2010/2011466.asp#section3> This means that millions of young Americans are graduating from this nation’s schools without the basic skills necessary to protect and participate in the civil dialogue and spirit of service that has kept our nation strong for over two centuries.

Together we can improve these dismal statistics and ensure that Utah's future voters are informed and involved. With the example of our historic leaders and the guidance of present educators and parents, we can also impress upon our youth the importance of undertaking these public endeavors for love of country and community, rather than for private gain.

James Madison believed that the adoption of the U.S. Constitution made the citizens of this nation "responsible for the greatest trust ever confided to a political society." See James Madison, *Address to the States* (April 26, 1783), in *THE PAPERS OF JAMES MADISON: PRESIDENTIAL SERIES 6:494* (R. A. Rutland, et al. ed., 1984). Because of educators like you, Utah will not breach this trust.

The mandate to preserve our constitutional heritage was expressed many years ago by luminaries more articulate than I, including Justice Joseph Storey, one of the early members of the United States Supreme Court. I would like to close with his words, because the eloquence is worth the length:

Let the American youth never forget, that they possess a noble inheritance, bought by the toils, and sufferings, and blood of their ancestors; and capable, if wisely improved, and faithfully guarded, of transmitting to the latest posterity all the substantial blessings of life, the peaceful enjoyment of liberty, property, religion, and independence. The structure has been erected by architects of consummate skill and fidelity; its foundations are solid, its compartments are beautiful, as well as useful; its arrangements are full of wisdom and order; and its defenses are impregnable from without. It has been reared for immortality, if the work of men may justly aspire to such a title. It may, nevertheless, perish in an hour by the folly, or corruption, or negligence of its only keepers, THE PEOPLE.

Justice Joseph L. Story, *COMMENTARIES ON THE CONSTITUTION OF THE U.S.* § 1907 (1833), available at <http://www.lonang.com/exlibris/story/sto-345.htm>

Tonight, we recognize your extraordinary efforts to preserve this noble inheritance by instilling in Utah's youth the conviction that selfless participation in government is not only a right, but every citizen's responsibility.